

Trees, Mines and Pipelines:

Natural Resource Dependence and Political Instability in the Congo Basin

Key Concepts

- Various reasons are proposed for the Congo Basin's political instability: ethnic conflict, population pressure, environmental degradation, easily accessed arms, and emigrant nationals who finance in-country rebels. While important, these are probably secondary factors.
- Recent studies suggest that major resource endowments—especially oil, hard minerals and timber—are strongly linked to dictatorships, sharp income disparities and unrest.
- Since in Africa these prized commodities were discovered during and after colonization, their exploitation bypassed traditional resource management systems that incorporated checks and balances.
- These commodities are prone to boom-and-bust pricing. When prices climb, nations neglect other tradeable goods and human resources; when prices crash, severe upheavals result.
- Amid the bad news, hopeful trends are overlooked—but should not be. CARPE's work has continued despite turmoil and danger; protected areas are expanding, and so is the role of civil society. CEFDHAC constitutes a rare success story among regional initiatives.

Introduction

With funding from USAID, the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) has operated in six Congo Basin countries¹ since 1996. A network of NGOs, local researchers, and other partners, CARPE has been supporting protected areas and improved forest resource management during a time of serious economic stress and civil unrest. Operating for most of this time in countries with no direct USAID presence, the project was designed to depend upon local and well-established international partners. Indeed, building in resilience in the face of potential instability was an explicit task of the project design team (led by the author Nov. 1994–Sept. 1995).

In the event, the region experienced much more instability and violence than predicted, yet the project was largely successful in avoiding serious disruption of its activities. As USAID begins the project's second phase, the opportunity presents itself to take stock of recent literature relevant to the region's seemingly intractable instability and to complement this with the direct experience of the project partners.

The region's unstable situation undoubtedly affects forest management and biodiversity conservation, but the implications are often unclear. Is it possible to introduce sustainable resource management in failing states? Is the civil conflict in the region a passing phase, or does it reflect long-term changes producing unpredictable relationships within and among the nation-states of central Africa? Is the nation-state itself in flux in this region, and if so, what does this mean for the environment? What should be the role of donor-supported conservation initiatives such as CARPE? What can be expected from unstable governments, or from armed opposition groups which may control important areas of forest biodiversity?

¹ In 2000 the number rose to nine, with the addition of Rwanda, Burundi, and São Tomé.



Related Issue Briefs

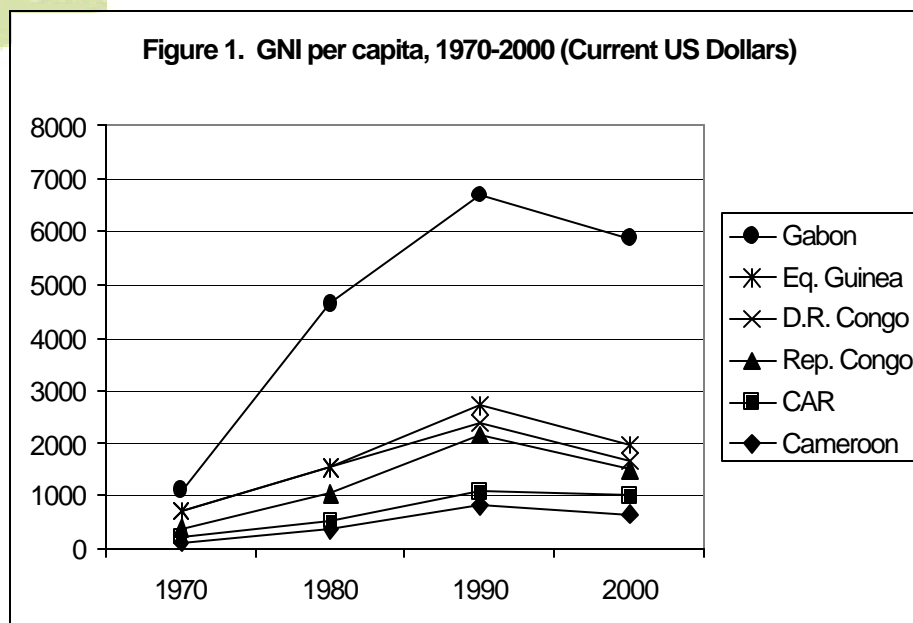
- #11 Forest Governance
- #20 Mobilizing Communities
- #22 Civil Instability
- #23 Bushmeat Crisis

This paper briefly surveys a literature which points to deep-seated structural, economic and political factors representing formidable development challenges for the Congo Basin region. Yet it also presents anecdotal observations suggesting the need to moderate some of the more pessimistic predictions for the future of these societies. Another paper in this series takes a closer look at the role of the concession system and its implications for contemporary natural resource management for logging as well as parks and protected areas—a vital topic, given recent donor interest in expanding investment in this area (Rebecca Hardin, forthcoming). The present paper presents a more general, broad-brush synthesis of contemporary studies on resource-dependent economies, and it attempts to relate their findings to the Congo Basin's present political and economic crisis, in the light of one regional project's direct experience during a turbulent period.

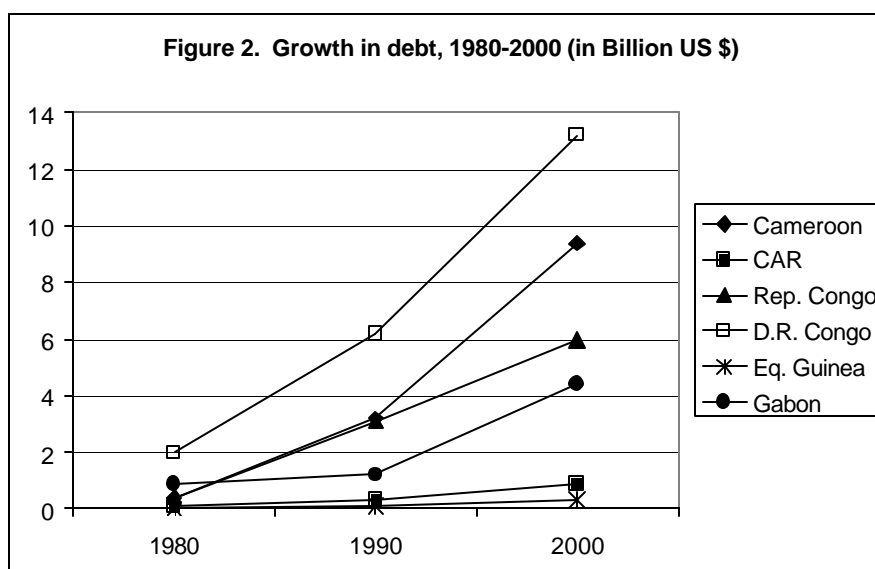
The paper will argue that the role of factors such as ethnicity and corruption is often misunderstood. More attention must be given to the links between natural resource dependence, weak governance structures, poor economic performance, the region's traumatic colonial legacy, and the destabilizing role of overseas diasporas and refugee movements within the Congo Basin. Just as important is the impressive resilience of countless individual central Africans, together with small NGOs and community groups, which often continue functioning in circumstances that would be devastating to developed countries' institutions. Clues to the future solutions of the region's deep-seated governance and institutional crises may well lie within such micro-level experience, as Africans themselves slowly disentangle corrupt and dysfunctional structures and find workable adaptations that are culturally meaningful, effective and sustainable. Though the point goes beyond the scope of this paper, the experience of the CARPE partners suggests that external observers are especially apt to overlook evidence of hopeful trends in this area.

Part I. Resource Dependence and Instability in the Congo Basin

Contemporary news reports from the Congo Basin highlight the sharp disparity between the region's great natural resource endowments, which in theory could make this part of Africa an economic powerhouse, and the poverty and unrest widespread in central Africa today. The region is extremely rich in natural resources, with high-value gems and strategic minerals, world-class hydropower potential, and the world's second largest block of contiguous tropical forest. Modest deposits of on-shore oil are fast being eclipsed by rich offshore fields with the potential to make this region one of the world's great petroleum producers.



Source: World Bank Data



Source: World Bank Data

since the early 1990s has seen genocide in Rwanda; waves of civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo–Kinshasa (DRC) and the Republic of Congo–Brazzaville; successive military *coups d'état* and mutinies in Burundi and the Central African Republic (CAR), and extreme poverty under despotic rule in Equatorial Guinea despite booming oil revenues.

Macroeconomic Crisis and Political Unrest

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and Gabon joined the ranks of middle-income countries due to oil, mineral and timber exports, yet their underlying human capital and institutions remained similar to those in other areas of Africa. Across the region, costly development schemes were initiated, stimulated by desire for political prestige and ready access to foreign financing; examples include the trans-Gabon railway and the huge Inga-Shaba hydropower project in what was then Zaïre. Such projects were often unsustainable, building up massive external debt for little development impact. Declining terms of trade since the 1980s, a weak policy and institutional framework, and poor economic management brought sharp reversals; at the same time, structural adjustment and the CFA franc devaluation in 1994 hit the urban middle class especially hard.

One result has been chronic salary arrears for those public sector employees still holding jobs. Many others, now unemployed, have returned to rural areas to find livelihoods. This last has brought an increase in agricultural clearing along the forest edge along with a rise in bushmeat poaching and artisanal mining, while urban areas have experienced rising crime and insecurity. The hoped-for upsurge in private sector investment and productivity has generally failed to materialize, and political unrest has become widespread, extending to armed rebellion and civil war in several countries. Although this pattern is evident in other parts of the continent, Central Africa has been particularly vulnerable, though there is little agreement as to why this is so.

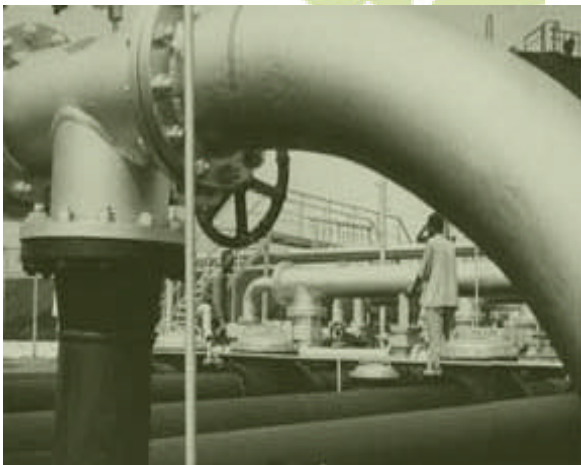
Yet per capita gross national income (GNI) growth has been stagnant or in decline during the last quarter-century, while external debt has skyrocketed, threatening future development (see figures 1 and 2). Though these trends are not unique in sub-Saharan Africa, they have been particularly acute in the Congo Basin region, now perceived as a “bad neighborhood” in contemporary writings on failed states. The period

Ethnicity, Poverty and Instability: The Search for Explanatory Factors

Explanations for the region's instability often stress ethnic and cultural differences, seen as sources of competition for economic resources and political power. These factors may also delay the development of socio-economic relationships based on formal or "bureaucratic" rules, as described by Max Weber; instead, they perpetuate the power of informal relationships and inherited status, which are less compatible with efficient, transparent, and competitive economic and political systems. Other frequently cited factors include demographic pressure, resource scarcity, declining living conditions, corruption and easy access to arms. Many writers still rely on "neo-Malthusian" models of this type, but on the whole the academic literature seems to be moving away from this line of thought.

Taking another tack, in the early 1990s Homer-Dixon began writing on the potential for "environmental conflict." In this model, resource degradation and scarcity interact with population growth to produce conflict, most likely along ethnic lines (Homer-Dixon 1991). But subsequent research has generally failed to substantiate the environmental conflict hypothesis, while there is growing consensus that viewing ethnicity as a causal factor is misleading. Although the Congo Basin comprises a large number of ethnic groups, it is not evident that it is ethnically more fragmented than other parts of Africa, or that its ethnic groups are inherently more conflict-prone or mutually antagonistic than elsewhere.

Other analysts stress the deterioration of governance and the crisis of state legitimacy, along with economic stress from structural adjustment, declining commodity revenues, and the post-Cold War reduction in foreign assistance. Empirical research is scarce, but a significant World Bank study has empirically identified a few specific risk factors for civil wars: primary commodity dependence, low income levels, and slow growth, plus a variable which has generally not been featured in previous work—the presence of large overseas diasporas able to support internal opposition movements and armed rebellion (Collier 2000).



❖ An export boom in a commodity like oil or gas may overheat and distort the local economy, delaying diversification and skills development in other sectors, such as manufacturing and services. (Photo: USAID Photo Archive)

High-Value Resources, "Dutch Disease" and Corruption

Sub-Saharan African societies have traditionally depended upon the use of natural resources such as forests and woodlands, wildlife, rivers and pastures. Traditional forms of subsistence use and even certain forms of long-distance trade evolved in ways which were sustainable and reasonably equitable. In fact, considerable attention has been given in recent years to positive linkages between governance, sustainable growth, and community-based resource management (CBNRM), especially in areas such as the Sahel. Many development practitioners believe that similar approaches, under the rubric of CBNRM or common-property resource management, offer larger lessons for improving the quality of governance in Africa. Key factors in the persistence of stable use patterns probably included low population densities and periodic migration to allow over-exploited areas to recuperate, but customary forms of conflict avoidance and resolution must also be considered.

Central Africa's problems dealing with natural resources involve both politics and economics. A growing body of literature suggests that for nation-states, major natural resource endowments—particularly minerals and non-renewable resources—are more likely to lead to autocratic governments, political repression, and severe income disparities. On the economic side, explanation begins with economies that depend heavily on the export of primary commodities whose prices tend to drop over time, while delaying diversification into other sectors such as manufacturing and services. This phenomenon, often termed “Dutch disease,” severely damages tradable sectors outside of the boom economy, and undermines investment in the human capital (technical and management skills) needed to sustain economic growth in increasingly competitive global markets. During the period 1975–1997, median GDP growth rates for the developing countries most dependent on mineral exports were just 2.6% per year, compared with 4.1% for developing countries with lesser resource endowments (Auty 1998). Resource-dependent countries may also display increasing income inequality and poor performance in educational, health services and other human development indicators.

Thus simply opening resource-dependent economies to international markets under liberalization policies will not necessarily bring the expected benefits. Where production becomes more capital-intensive as a result of foreign investment, or more exposed to price competition from other exporting countries, the resource-export sector often becomes less able to keep absorbing a large and growing unskilled labor pool. In countries with very low human development levels, weak governance structures, and limited opportunities to cope with economic dislocation, this can be a recipe for disaster.

In addition, the rents (royalties and taxes) generated by exploitation of minerals, oil and timber offer strong incentives for “rent-seeking behavior” and corruption in the public sector, distorting policy decisions, undermining economic efficiency, and weakening the rule of law. One recent contribution to the literature highlights the unusual exception of Botswana, which has used prudent economic management of diamond revenues to avoid these outcomes. But Botswana appears to be the exception that proves the rule (see Saraf and Jiwaji 2001).

Resource Monopolies and Rural Neglect

It is also important to examine the political (or political economy) side of the picture. In contrast with traditional resources such as fuelwood, non-timber forest products or wildlife, the Congo Basin's contemporary export commodities lack a social context which might have evolved regulating norms of behavior. These resources were discovered by the colonial or post-colonial state, which typically monopolizes their exploitation. The magnitude of rents associated with oil, diamonds or gold is another complicating factor, vastly raising the stakes for exploitation and crowding out other forms of livelihood and land use.

Beyond the big cities supported by central government expenditures, and the mining or logging enclaves supplied and run by concessionaires—often relics of the colonial era—are large rural areas lacking exportable resources. These have been left to fend for themselves,



High-value, easily looted commodities like “conflict diamonds” can be a key element in civil unrest. (Photo: USAID Photo Archive)

receiving few governmental services and having little or no input into policy. Often, remote regions have effectively become cut off from the “state.” This is especially true of the DRC and the Republic of Congo, but can also be seen in parts of the CAR, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

In this sense the Congo Basin represents an unfortunate combination of weak, poorly governed states with rich endowments of precisely the kinds of resources—oil, gems, strategic minerals, timber—most suited to abusive exploitation. Where such resources are of high value and easily looted (e.g., gems), they can also become key elements of civil unrest, financing arms purchases for armed groups resisting central government authority (e.g., “conflict diamonds”).

Some scholars speculate that countries with a stronger agricultural sector are less apt to follow the path of rural neglect combined with political unrest and autocracy. Agricultural economies need to maintain effective trading links with the rural areas producing coffee, cacao, palm oil, cotton, etc., which tend to be distributed across larger geographic areas and involve a large share of the rural population in production. Moreover, crops are not readily looted, and have only moderate value as potential sources of financing for armed groups. In this respect, Cameroon’s strong agricultural tradition poses a significant contrast to other parts of the Congo Basin. However, as Cameroon’s timber has grown more important in recent years and cash crops have lost value, these differences may count for less than in the past.

Terms such as “resource curse,” “staple trap” and “Dutch disease” are now used to describe this dilemma of state dependence on rents arising from exploitation of natural resources. One survey finds that such countries, or “rentier states,” tend to eventually experience a growth collapse *“accompanied by shrinking government revenues, deteriorating institutional capital and declining quality in the provision of education and in investment more generally”* (Auty 1998). Another recent study also finds a strong relationship between resource dependence and authoritarian governments, with a 1% increase in the ratio of primary commodity exports to GDP associated with an almost 8% rise in the probability of authoritarian government (Wantchekon and Jensen, 2000). Across categories of export commodities, the study found that hard minerals were the most strongly linked with authoritarianism, followed by oil and non-mineral commodities such as timber. Such effects are particularly pronounced in societies in which rents primarily accrue to the central government—as is the case in central Africa.

Roots of the Repressive Rentier State

Historically, cities have served as the foundation for state creation. In Africa, however, colonial capitals were sited for convenience of communication and trade linkages with Europe. Following earlier British practice in Asia, the colonial governance model in central Africa was indirect rule, but administered through new power centers. Colonial capitals were typically located near coasts or in highland areas preferred by Europeans for health and climate reasons; in most cases, these were not the centers of power which African societies had evolved over the centuries (Herbst 2000). Tribal or customary authorities were permitted to maintain jurisdiction in certain domains, but always in subsidiary roles (Mamdani 1996). And in central African concessions European managers exercised vast powers, becoming widely known as *“les rois de brousse”*—kings of the bush (Davidson 1992).

The historian Crawford Young has described central Africa’s major cities as economic “suction pumps,” extracting resources from rural areas for the benefit of those controlling the urban bases of power. Although there is a tendency to assume that the predatory economic and political practices epitomized by Mobutu’s “kleptocracy” are a post-colonial phenomenon, colonial practices laid the groundwork for heavy-handed

economic exploitation and repressive political administration, especially under the territorial concession system. Abuses such as the severing of hands for failure to meet rubber harvest quotas sparked the creation in 1904 of one of the first human rights organizations, the Congo Reform Association, and a letter-writing campaign urging international intervention. Between 1880 and 1908, when Leopold II was forced to cede control to the Belgian government, the population of the Congo Free State dropped by as much as one-half as a result of forced labor, disease, hunger and military suppression; estimates of the death toll range from five to ten million persons (Hochschild 1998). As Reno observes,

Then, as now, the rest of the world was willing to pretend the Congo Free State was a state, at least until abuses there could no longer be ignored. (Reno, p. 38)

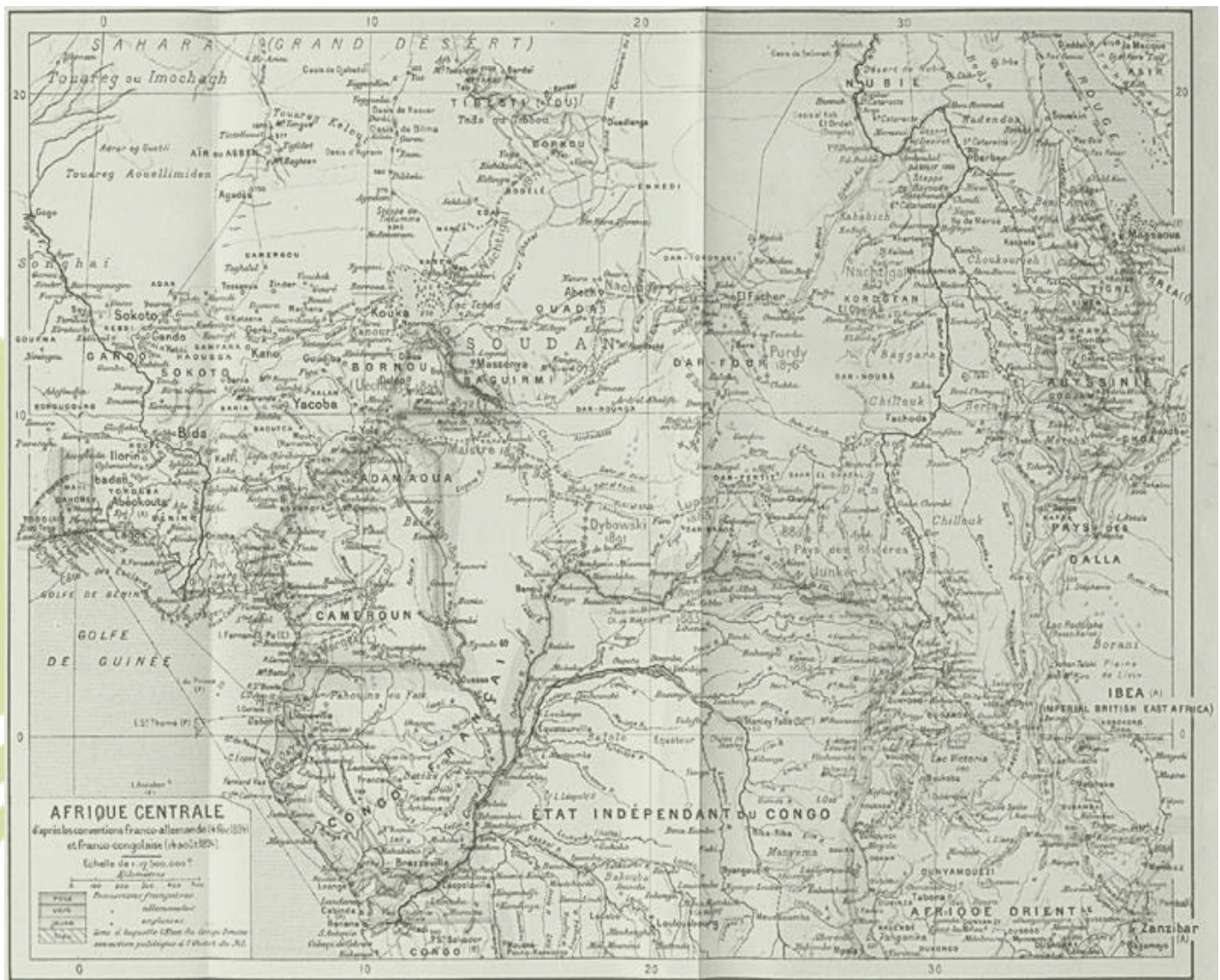
Enforcement of this harshly exploitative system required frequent resort to armed suppression of resistance and uprisings. Colonial military and police forces were composed of African soldiers led by a tiny cadre of European officers. In the Congo Free State, for example, by 1897 the new *Force Publique* had 14,000 Africans

under arms, led by just 360 Europeans (Davidson 1992). Again following British practice in India, military units were ethnically selected to prevent the rise of competing loyalties and to minimize sympathy toward local populations. (The continuing over-representation of certain groups in today's national armed forces may be another factor contributing to contemporary ethnic resentments.) Periods of economic hardship in Europe, such as the Great Depression of the 1930s, increased the importance of resource flows from colonies, while colonial budgets emphasized attention to areas whose economic value was worth the costs of administration. As a result, economically marginal areas were less likely to see investment in infrastructure, social services or other public goods.

By the end of the colonial period, virtually the entire Congolese formal economic sector was controlled by Europeans and a handful of large firms (Davidson 1992), a direct legacy of Leopold's concession system. At independence, local elites largely assumed the functions of departing colonial administrators and businessmen. They did not, however, fundamentally redirect political and



Map showing the dates and areas of European occupation of Central and Southern Africa. This pattern of conquest continues to play an important role in conflicts involving natural resources today. From *An Atlas of African History* by J. D. Fage, maps drawn by Maureen Verity (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1978). Copyright © 1978 by J. D. Fage. Reproduced with the permission of the publisher.



❶ This map shows the political divisions and exploration activities of the European powers in 1885, as France, Belgium, Germany and Great Britain competed for control of the Congo basin. (Source: University of Texas Library)

economic structures explicitly aimed at extracting primary commodities from a politically irrelevant hinterland. Equally important, political sovereignty and nationhood were transferred on the basis of the colonial boundaries, in most cases without revisiting their political or social logic or the claims of pre-colonial governance traditions. Though politically independent, the new central African nation-states continued to depend on the rents generated by the resource export sector, and they remained closely tied to European commercial and financial interests as well as to foreign assistance from the former colonial powers.

The Congo Basin continues to be seen as a storehouse of great natural wealth, though demand for its various products has fluctuated sharply over time. This has been true in the past of ivory, copper, timber, diamonds, gold, uranium and cobalt; most recently, world market prices have peaked, then crashed in the case of “coltan”—columbite-tantalite, used in the manufacture of components for cellphones. During the period

2000–2001, prices for refined coltan powder went from \$50 per pound to over \$400 before falling back to around \$100 (Essick 2001). Frequently this boom-and-bust cycle provokes abrupt population movements, social and political disruption, and environmental degradation. What has tended to remain constant, however, has been the failure of these resource flows to translate into sustainable and diversified economic growth. Causes (and symptoms) of this failure—deteriorating infrastructure, collapsing markets and poor leadership—appear to feed on each other, rather than being driven by any single factor such as ethnicity.

Warlords and Failed States: The Crisis of Legitimacy

All too often, the primary opportunity for economic accumulation lies not in entrepreneurial investment, but rather in gaining control of the “suction pump” mechanism described by Young, directing its flows toward the advancement and protection of one’s own group and using whatever means are available to fend off rivals. Under this model of “rentier state” governance, in good times competitors are bought off, while in bad times competition may turn violent; extreme cases can result in a so-called “failed state.” A number of examples have appeared in the 1990s, with the dramatic rise of warlords in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Republic of Congo, CAR, and DRC following the collapse of the regime which had succeeded colonial rule.

It is increasingly clear that contemporary central African nations are encountering a crisis of legitimacy, as the ambiguities and dysfunctions inherited from colonial power structures are aggravated by economic decline and poor governance. Rather than seeing instability and conflict as the product of desperation erupting spontaneously among the poor (whether rural or urban), some political scientists now emphasize the conscious use of disorder and violence as a means of consolidating power and eliminating rivals (Chabal and Daboz 1999). On balance, ethnicity seems less a causal factor, impelling a mutual distrust or antagonism, than simply an organizing principle for personalized leadership systems based on the distribution of patronage along kinship lines.

African social and political systems have long used patronage as a mechanism of redistribution, which among other things has served functions of food and income security. But central Africa’s post-colonial governments arguably have taken these traditional patronage mechanisms to often absurd extremes (i.e., “kleptocracy”), combining some of the worst features of both traditional and modern governance systems. When the price volatility of global commodity markets is factored in, with its potential to severely reduce the flow of resources needed to sustain patronage networks and to buy off opposition, it is evident that instability is inherent to this system.

Economic crisis can bring about intense struggles for the resource flows needed to sustain “big men” and their networks of followers or “clients,” and—crucially—to ensure the vital cooperation of the large military and police forces inherited from the colonial state. Against the backdrop of such competition, various kinds of triggering events can abruptly turn into intense (though often brief) violence, much as wars can flare up between organized crime families or mafias in Western and certain East Asian societies. Triggering events may include demonstrations during national or local elections, the arrest or suspicious death of a faction leader, attempts to disarm members of an opposition group, or even fast-spreading rumors which induce panic among the population: all of these occurred in several Congo Basin countries during the first phase of the CARPE project. Overseas diasporas can also become highly significant at this point, as they represent external sources of funding for opposition groups (often defined by ethnic or regional identity) and for the mobilization of would-be governments in exile (Collier 2000). At the extreme, the result is a failed state and warlordism.

Another factor has appeared in the past decade which further threatens stability: the markets for low-cost automatic weapons following the breakup of the former Soviet Union. According to a recent study, militia groups in the Republic of Congo acquired some 74,000 small arms and light weapons during the period 1993–1999, while the national armed forces as such virtually ceased to exist (Demetriou et al. 2001). Combined with

the many logistical and organizational handicaps faced by central governments in Africa, low-cost access to modern arms can create the potential for de facto sovereignty in areas controlled by militias or armed opposition groups. The rise of warlordism undermines the (already weak) legitimacy of the nation-state, accentuates ethnic or regional tensions, and risks triggering wider civil war; in the case of the DRC, it has drawn neighboring countries into the conflict, profoundly destabilizing the entire region.

Post-Cold War Realignments and Shrinking Aid Budgets

The period following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of the Cold War, and also brought about an abrupt end to a long period when foreign assistance was justified by the need to maintain “friendly” governments in Africa. Though the early 1990s saw a wave of reforms and elections, including constitutional conventions in several Congo Basin countries, in most cases governments have subsequently fallen prey to increased unrest and instability, or have turned away from political reforms in favor of consolidating power. At the same time, there has been a growing donor tendency to predicate all but basic humanitarian assistance on programs of economic and political reforms; thus developmental aid to many of these countries has fallen.

In the last few years, poor economic performance, autocratic governance and conflict in much of central Africa have brought about donor fatigue and disillusion, risking even greater cuts in coming years. Meanwhile, the international community has become increasingly reluctant to intervene to protect governments from military coups or civil unrest, as had been common during the first two decades after independence. Following highly publicized military interventions by the U.S. in Somalia (1993), Belgium and France in Rwanda (1994) and France in CAR (1996–97), Western intervention in Africa has been largely limited to the evacuation of foreign nationals in times of conflict.

Liberalization and Democratization: The “Washington Consensus”

As bilateral assistance levels have declined, there has been a corresponding rise in the importance of lending programs from the Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank and the IMF, which have tended to condition assistance on a wide-ranging set of economic policies. In contrast with the earlier bilateral foreign assistance models, which stressed political reliability along Cold War lines as well as favored access to donor country economic interests, the Bretton Woods model is less explicitly political, yet arguably far more intrusive with regard to societal choices and development options.

The basic model underlying this approach, which has come to be known as the “Washington consensus,” predicts that economic liberalization will unleash market forces and kick-start growth by reducing the public sector’s role in the economy, freeing up capital and opportunities for private sector-led growth. In parallel, political democratization and increased scope for civil society will make government more accountable and contribute to better long-term equity from growth of the economy. More recently, in response to international concerns about stifling levels of debt, the Bretton Woods institutions have also stressed the importance of cutting military expenditures and increasing investment in education and health, which contribute to economic productivity, as conditions for debt reduction programs.

Reform in the Context of Rentier States

Critics of the Washington consensus often focus on trade issues, notably the effects of globalization on fragile developing-country economies—issues which are widely debated even in industrialized societies. With respect to central Africa, critics also focus on several practical issues, suggesting that even if the underlying model is essentially sound over the longer term, adjustments are needed in view of local realities. Since the 1980s,

reform programs such as structural adjustment have tended to function as a blunt instrument, dismantling public services in the name of macroeconomic efficiency with little regard to what will succeed them. At the same time, some parastatal agencies and public enterprises have been privatized to the benefit of incompetent or corrupt interests. Moreover, where services have been discontinued altogether, little has been done to absorb the large numbers of laid-off employees. Many of these were supporting relatives in impoverished rural areas which have come to depend upon remittances from the cities. As was famously quipped about IMF “shock therapy” in Russia, what is needed is “more therapy, less shock.”

Aspects of rentier states discussed above are also relevant to attempts to bring about structural changes in Congo Basin economies. For example, many privatization programs appear to operate to the benefit of the same kinship-based patronage networks now dominating the public sector, rather than stimulating the rise of an independent private sector. In this scenario, as public sector rents dry up under adjustment programs, these “recycled elites” respond to increased incentives to capture other areas of the economy. Thus, the economic reforms may be ineffective or even counterproductive in the absence of changes to the basic political economy of such states. To the extent that reform programs have eroded the development of an urban middle class, which would be expected to feature prominently in the modernization of central African institutions, any gains

in economic efficiency may have been offset by weakening the domestic political forces needed to sustain reform in the longer term. This point is critical, as recent World Bank research indicates that “*each additional dollar in aid is five times more effective in countries with good policies*” (World Bank 2000).



The middle class is the natural motor of civil society and political reform. However, in many countries it has been decimated by the draconian economic liberalization called for by structural adjustment. (Photo: Art Westneat)

Some scholars note that the early observations of Max Weber are still relevant here, notably those on the importance of developing a substantial distinction between “state” and “society,” and between what is essentially “public” and “private” in the realms of politics and economics. Traditional systems of governance made little formal distinction in this area, and “big man” styles of leadership clearly have deep roots in much of Africa. Yet as historian Basil Davidson notes, many precolonial African states had also evolved effective and robust accountability mechanisms which served a critical counterbalancing function. These modes of accountability were mostly destroyed during the colonial period. They

have yet to be replaced in the postcolonial nation-state, whether by Western models of formal, constitutionally based separation of powers and legally defined checks and balances, or by evolving alternative approaches. In the meantime, the international community periodically debates the appropriate role and limits of peacekeeping and other interventions, but there is deep reluctance to become directly engaged in the internal affairs of sovereign countries, even as it becomes increasingly evident that failing states do not meet important criteria for “nation-states.”

PART II: LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM CARPE

As a result of operating in the Congo Basin region during five years of significant unrest and instability, the experience of the CARPE project permits several observations about forest conservation in a context of resource-dependent states beset by civil conflict:

1. Against long odds, work has continued. The project has been minimally affected by high levels of unrest or deteriorating public services and institutions, in large part due to its applied research focus, reliance on NGOs and local researchers, minimal dependence on government, and limited dependence on site-specific activities which would be most vulnerable to conflict. These benefits may be reduced as CARPE increasingly moves toward field demonstrations of sustainable resource management approaches, placing more of a premium on early warning of trouble and developing effective contingency plans. On the other hand, conservation groups have been able to return to their sites following outbreaks of violence, and in many cases local staff have shown great commitment and courage by continuing to operate at considerable personal risk. (See Briefing Sheet #22, “*Conservation in a Region of Civil Instability.*”)
2. Civil society’s role is expanding. NGOs and the media are becoming more engaged and more willing to take public positions and advocate environmental concerns. This represents a substantial advance over the situation several years ago, when civil society capacity was marginal in comparison with other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. One result is that local forest resource users are beginning to have a forum for voicing their views and needs, an aspect long overlooked by government and logging companies. One intriguing question is whether there is potential for this opening to carry over to other parts of society, and the potential political implications of such a movement. (See Briefing Sheet #20, “*Mobilizing Communities to Conserve Forest Resources.*”)
3. Regional awareness is also growing. The regional CEFDHAC (*Conférence sur les Ecosystèmes des Forêts Denses et Humides de l’Afrique Centrale*) process launched by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) now encompasses nine countries. It is both raising awareness of trans-Basin issues and building a platform for transfer of environmental information and lessons learned (Briefing Sheet, forthcoming). This raises the international profile of countries which are individually seen as weak or failing states, and provides incentives for further engagement at the regional level. Only five years ago, many doubted whether the region was capable of establishing any platform for cross-boundary engagement on forest-related issues, as nearly all previous regional bodies were seen as abject failures and an egregious waste of resources. Interestingly, it appears to be in the environmental arena that the first (and perhaps only) successful regional initiative has emerged in the Congo Basin.
4. International interest in the bushmeat issue is becoming significant and new protected areas are likely to result, bringing greater pressure on governments to tighten enforcement (Briefing Sheet #23, “*Bushmeat Crisis: Causes, Consequences and Controls*”). This may also represent a new avenue for pressure on logging companies to “clean up their act,” and innovative joint efforts are now being tested between timber companies, NGOs, and conservation groups which would not have been plausible several years ago. If these trends continue, there may be some potential for forest management to become a leading sector with respect to changing resource use and governance paradigms, in a part of the world which has had little good news in these areas. (See Briefing Sheet #11, *Central Africa and Forest Governance: Counter-Balancing the Powers of Public and Private Sectors*.) Of course, there is no way to know how far the effects of equitable and sustainable forest management can realistically be expected to extend, nor what reactions they may generate within segments of the political economy which stand to lose from changes in the way business is now done.

Elsewhere, forest conservation is often seen as an issue for rich countries, but peripheral to developing-country priorities. It is crucial to challenge this perception. Perhaps in the Congo Basin, partnerships for forest resource management can play a role in shifting the paradigm from unsustainable mining of natural resources to approaches more compatible with accountability, good governance and sustainable development.



FURTHER READING

Azam, Jean-Paul. "The Redistributive State and Conflicts in Africa." Sept. 1999, keynote address, Norwegian Association for Development Research, Oslo.

Auty, Richard. 1998. *Resource Abundance and Economic Development: Improving the Performance of Resource-Rich Countries*. Helsinki: UN University/World Institute for Development Economics Research.

Ayittey, George B. N. 1999. *Africa in Chaos*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Bayart, Jean-François, Stephen Ellis and Béatrice Hibou. 1999. *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, and Oxford: James Currey.

Bayart, Jean-François. 1993. *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. New York: Longman.

Bratton, Michael and Nicolas van de Walle. 1997. *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Chabal, Patrick and Jean-Pascal Daboz. 1999. *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, and Oxford: James Currey.

Collier, Paul. 2000. *Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy*. Washington, D.C.: the World Bank.

Davidson, Basil. 1992. *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*. New York: Random House.

Demetriou, Spyros, Robert Muggah, and Ian Biddle. 2001. *Small Arms Availability and Trade in the Rep. of Congo*. Geneva, Switzerland: Small Arms Survey, Sept.

Essick, Kristi. 2001. "Guns, Money and Cell Phones." *The Industry Standard Magazine*, June 11.

Esty, Daniel, Jack A. Goldstone, Ted Robert Gurr, Barbara Harff, Marc Levy, Geoffrey D. Dabelko, Pamela T. Surko and Alan N. Unger. 1998. *State Failure Task Force Report: Phase II Findings*. McLean, Virginia: SAIC Inc.

Hardin, Rebecca. Forthcoming. "Concessionary Politics in the Western Congo Basin: History and Culture in Forest Use Practices." Washington, D.C.: USAID CARPE Project.

Herbst, Jeffrey. 2000. *State and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Hochschild, Adam. 1998. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Homer-Dixon, Thomas. 1991. "On the Threshold: Environmental Changes as Causes of Acute Conflict." *International Security* 16 (2): 76-116.

Kaldor, Mary. 1999. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lemarchand, René. 1997. "Patterns of State Collapse and Reconstruction in Central Africa: Reflections on the Crisis in the Great Lakes." Paper presented to the XVIIth World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Seoul, S. Korea. Aug.

Luckham, Robin, Ismail Ahmed, Robert Muggah and Sarah White. 2001. *Conflict and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Assessment of the Issues and Evidence*. IDS Working Paper 128. Brighton, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Östensson, Olle and Aimable Uwizeye-Mapendano. 2000. "Growth and Diversification in Mineral Economies." Cape Town: UNCTAD workshop on mineral economies in Africa. Nov. 2000.

Reno, William. 1998. *Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.

Rothchild, Donald. 1997. *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa: Pressures and Incentives for Cooperation*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Sachs, J. D. and A. Warner. 1997. *Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Institute for International Development.

Sarraf, Maria and Murtaza Jiwanji. 2001. *Beating the Resource Curse: The Case of Botswana*. Washington, D.C.: the World Bank.

Smith, Dan. 2001. *Trends and Causes of Armed Conflicts*. Berlin: Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management.

United Nations Security Council. 2001. *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo*. S/2001/357.

Vansina, Jan. 1990. *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.

Wantchekon, Leonard and Nathan Jensen. 2000. *Resource Wealth and Political Regimes in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

World Bank. 2000. *The World Bank Group in Africa: Overview*. Sept. <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/overview.pdf>

Young, Crawford. 1994. *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

CARPE ... What is it? Central African Regional Program for the Environment

Launched in 1995, the Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) engages African NGOs, research and educational organizations, private-sector consultants, and government agencies in evaluating threats to forest integrity in the Congo Basin and in identifying opportunities to sustainably manage the region's vast forests for the benefit of Africans and the world. CARPE's members are helping to provide African decision makers with the information they will need to make well-informed choices about forest use in the future. Participating countries include Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé e Príncipe.

For further information contact:

John Flynn
Director, CARPE
USAID Bureau for Africa
c/o American Embassy, Kinshasa
Unit 31550, APO AE 09828
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
joflynn@usaid.gov

Web site:
<http://carpe.umd.edu>



Cover Photo by David Wilkie

Publication services provided by The Mitchell Group, Inc. (TMG), pursuant to the following
USAID contract: AFR/SD Support Services Contract Number AOT-C-00-99-00224-00